



An Extended Guide · No. 1713

Common Well-Pump Backup Mistakes

The avoidable slip-ups,
and the honest fixes

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! Read this first — on a well, no power means no water

On a home with a private well, a power outage isn't just dark — it's dry. The pump that lifts your water runs on your home's electricity, so when the power stops, every tap, toilet, and hose stops with it. Keep a few days of stored drinking water on hand as a backup you can count on — a common guideline is about a gallon per person per day. And know this from the start: a well pump is almost always a 240-volt appliance wired straight into your electrical panel, so any backup hookup for it is a licensed electrician's job. Never try to feed it with a cord or by backfeeding an outlet — that is unsafe, against code, and can put deadly voltage on the power lines outside. Most well-water backup regret comes from a short list of avoidable mistakes. Knowing them ahead of time is the easiest way to get your plan right the first time — and one of them is genuinely dangerous, so this guide matters.

Common well-pump backup mistakes

After helping many well-water families, I have seen the same handful of mistakes again and again. Every one is avoidable, and knowing them now saves you money, frustration, and — in one case — real danger.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. This guide is the 'what not to do' companion to the rest of the category. Think of it as learning from other folks' hard-won lessons, so you can skip straight to a plan that works.

I have grouped the mistakes into water, power, safety, and planning, with the honest fix for each. Read it once and you will sidestep the traps that catch most people. Where a mistake deserves more detail, I point you to the guide that covers it.

★ Want to check your plan against this list?

If you already have a backup setup, I am glad to look it over against these common mistakes. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 for a friendly second opinion.

The whole list, in about a minute

If you remember only these, you have avoided the biggest traps.

- ❑ Do not skip stored water — it is the cheap layer under everything else.
- ❑ Do not expect a 120-volt generator or a small power station to start a 240-volt pump.
- ❑ Do not size to running watts — the startup surge is the number that matters.
- ❑ Never run a cord to the pump or backfeed an outlet — it is deadly. Use a transfer switch.
- ❑ Do not skip testing — a plan you have never tried is only a hope.
- ❑ Do not forget the septic pump, the animals, and any medical or senior needs.

! One mistake can kill — the rest just cost

Backfeeding is the one mistake on this list that can take a life. The others cost money or comfort. Get the safety one right above all, then tidy up the rest.

Water mistakes

These are the ones that leave a well home dry when it did not have to be.

- **No stored water.** Leaning on a generator or battery as the only layer, with nothing underneath if it fails. The fix: keep a few days of water, always. See our storing-water guide.
- **Trusting the pressure tank as a supply.** Its usable reserve is minutes, not days. The fix: capture it fast and rely on stored water. See our pressure-tank guide.
- **Storing too little.** Enough to drink but nothing for flushing, washing, or animals. The fix: plan generously, including the thirsty jobs.
- **Waiting to fill up.** On a well, you cannot fill after the power is out — the pump is off. The fix: fill before the storm, or capture the tank's reserve at once.

The thread through all of these is treating water as an afterthought. On a well, water is the whole point — so it deserves the first, simplest layer of your plan, in place before anything else.

✓ Stored water fixes most water mistakes

Nearly every water mistake is undone by keeping a few days of stored water. It is cheap, simple, and the fix for the most common regret of all.

Power mistakes — buying the wrong thing

These waste money and leave folks with a machine that cannot do the one job they bought it for.

- **A 120-volt-only generator.** Most well pumps need 240 volts. The fix: confirm true 240-volt output before you buy. See our portable-generator guide.
- **Expecting a small power station to run the pump.** Most are 120-volt and cannot. The fix: use a battery for the quiet loads, a generator for the pump. See our power-station guide.
- **Sizing to running watts.** The startup surge is the real test. The fix: match the generator's surge to the pump's startup, with headroom. See our sizing guide.
- **Guessing the pump's numbers.** The fix: get the horsepower and voltage from the nameplate or your well company — never guess.

The common root here is buying before knowing your pump. Get your pump's real numbers first, and the right machine almost picks itself. Guessing is how folks end up buying twice.

✓ Start from the pump, not the store

Every power mistake traces back to shopping before you know your pump's numbers. Get those first, and you will buy the right thing once.

The safety mistake that can kill

This one is different from all the others, so I give it its own page. Please read it carefully.

The most dangerous mistake in this whole category is trying to power your pump or home by running a cord backward into an outlet — backfeeding, with what electricians grimly call a 'suicide cord.' It is illegal, against code, and genuinely deadly. The exposed prongs are live, and the power can flow out to the utility lines and electrocute a lineman working to restore your power.

The fix is absolute and simple: never backfeed. Power a hardwired pump only through a transfer switch or interlock installed by a licensed electrician. That equipment exists precisely to make backfeeding impossible. Our guide on connecting backup power covers the safe way in full.

! Never backfeed — there is no exception

No outage is worth a life. Never run a cord into an outlet to power your home or pump. Always a transfer switch or interlock, always by a licensed electrician. This is the one hard rule of the whole category.

The other safety mistake — carbon monoxide

The second deadly mistake is about where you run a generator. It is just as important.

A running generator's exhaust contains carbon monoxide — an invisible, odorless gas that can kill in minutes. The mistake is running one indoors, in a garage, in a shed, or on a porch — even with a door open. Every year people are harmed this way, believing a cracked door makes it safe. It does not.

The fix: run a generator outdoors only, well away from the house — the safety agencies say at least 20 feet — with the exhaust pointed away from windows, doors, and vents, and battery-backup carbon-monoxide alarms in the home. Our game-plan and portable-generator guides cover this fully.

! Outdoors only — an open door is not enough

Never run a generator inside any structure, even with the door open. Place it well away from the house, exhaust pointed away, and keep CO alarms working. Fresh air first, always.

The mistake of never testing

This one is quiet, common, and entirely avoidable — and it turns a good setup into a bad surprise.

Plenty of folks buy a generator, have the hookup installed, and then never actually run the whole thing until a real outage — in the dark, in a storm, under stress. That is exactly when you do not want to discover the generator will not start, the pump trips it, or you are unsure how to switch over.

The fix costs nothing: test the whole sequence on a calm, sunny day. Start the generator, switch over, watch water come back, and learn the routine when there is no pressure. Any surprise found on a calm day is a minor fix; the same surprise in a storm is a crisis. Our testing guide walks through it.

✓ A plan untested is only a hope

Run your whole setup once on a calm day. It is the single most valuable hour you can spend on your backup plan, and it costs nothing but the time.

The forgotten loads

These are the things left off the plan — each one a nasty surprise when it turns up mid-outage.

- **The septic pump.** Many rural homes have one, and it stops with the power, risking a backup. The fix: include it in your plan. See our septic guide.
- **The furnace in winter.** A gas furnace still needs power for its blower. The fix: plan to run it, or have backup heat. See our winter guide.
- **The animals.** Livestock can need a great deal of water. The fix: count their needs into your water plan.
- **Medical and senior needs.** Extra water, medicines, and any device. The fix: plan around the person. See our medical-needs guide.

The pattern here is planning for the obvious — lights, fridge, the well pump — and forgetting the rest. A complete plan walks through every way your home uses water and power, not just the first few that come to mind.

✓ Walk through your whole home

Avoid forgotten loads by mentally walking through a whole day: water in, water out, heat, animals, and anyone with special needs. Nothing gets left off that way.

Planning mistakes

These are the ones that turn a fine setup into a scramble when it matters.

- **Planning for hours, not days.** Rural outages run long. The fix: size your water and fuel for a multi-day outage.
- **No written plan.** A plan in your head helps only you, only if you are home and calm. The fix: write it on a card, taped inside a cabinet.
- **Overloading the generator.** Starting the pump with big loads already running trips it. The fix: give the pump a clear runway.
- **Ignoring the pump's health.** Short-cycling and dry running wear it out. The fix: fix short-cycling and never run dry. See our pump-protection guide.

Good planning is mostly about thinking it through once, calmly, and writing it down so the whole household can follow it. That small effort is what separates a smooth outage from a frantic one.

✓ Write it down for everyone

A one-page written plan taped inside a cabinet means anyone in the house can run the outage, even on a day you are not there. It is the fix for most planning mistakes at once.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

These mistakes matter most on a well, but a few apply to any home with a generator.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town or the suburbs on city water, the water mistakes mostly do not apply — your taps keep flowing. But the safety mistakes absolutely do: backfeeding is just as deadly, and carbon monoxide just as dangerous, whether you are on a well or not.

- The water mistakes mostly don't apply — city water keeps flowing.
- The safety mistakes apply fully — never backfeed, never run a generator indoors.
- Test your setup regardless, so an outage is not a scramble.
- Don't forget a sump pump or other powered loads in your plan.

If you are out in the country on a well

Out in the country on a well, every mistake on this list applies — water, power, safety, and planning — because your water depends entirely on your power. This is the guide's true audience.

- Every category of mistake applies — water is on the line, not just comfort.
- The power mistakes matter because you must start a 240-volt pump.
- The forgotten loads — septic, animals, medical needs — are common out here.
- Plan for the long outages rural lines are prone to.

★ Let's check your plan against the list

Whether you are on a well or in town, a quick review catches these before they catch you. Call me at (330) 200-8042 and we will go through them together.

If you fix only five things

Short on time? These five fixes prevent the great majority of well-water backup trouble.

- ❑ **Keep stored water** — the cheap layer under everything, in place before any outage.
- ❑ **Get your pump's numbers** — so you buy the right generator, once.
- ❑ **Use a proper hookup** — a transfer switch or interlock, never a cord or backfeed.
- ❑ **Run generators outdoors only** — carbon monoxide is the real danger.
- ❑ **Test it on a calm day** — so the first real run is not in a storm.

Do these five and you have avoided the mistakes that cause almost all the regret, the danger, and the wasted money in this category. Everything else is refinement.

★ Five fixes, one afternoon

These five are very doable, and I am glad to help with any of them. Call or text (330) 200-8042 and we will knock them out together.

Why these mistakes are so easy to make

None of these happen because folks are careless. They happen for understandable reasons, which is why knowing them helps.

Most of these mistakes come from reasonable assumptions that simply are not true for well pumps: that any generator can run a pump, that a battery is always better, that the pressure tank holds plenty, that you can fill up when the power goes. Each seems sensible until you know how a well system actually works.

The dangerous ones — backfeeding, running a generator inside — often come from not realizing the risk, or from a rushed decision in a cold, dark outage. That is exactly why planning ahead, on a calm day, matters so much. A clear head now prevents a bad choice later.

✓ Knowledge is the whole fix

These mistakes come from understandable assumptions, not carelessness. Simply knowing the truth about how a well system works prevents nearly all of them.

A quick self-check for your plan

Run through these questions and you will spot any mistake hiding in your own setup.

- ☐ Do I have a few days of stored water, right now?
- ☐ Do I know my pump's voltage and horsepower?
- ☐ Can my backup power actually start the pump — 240 volts and the surge?
- ☐ Is my hookup a proper transfer switch or interlock, installed by a pro?
- ☐ Have I tested the whole thing on a calm day?
- ☐ Have I planned for the septic pump, animals, heat, and any medical needs?

A 'no' or 'not sure' on any of these points to a mistake worth fixing before the next outage. None is hard to put right, and each one you fix makes your plan sturdier.

★ Let's run the self-check together

If any of those gave you pause, that is exactly what I am here for. Call or text (330) 200-8042 and we will turn every 'not sure' into a confident 'yes.'

Already have a setup? How to check it

If you inherited or installed a backup setup years ago, it is worth a fresh look against these mistakes.

Older setups sometimes carry old mistakes — a generator that never quite started the pump, a hookup you are not sure is a proper transfer switch, or a plan no one has tested in years. There is no shame in it; things change and knowledge grows. A calm review can catch a problem before it catches you.

Start with the safety items — confirm the hookup is a real transfer switch or interlock, never a backfeed arrangement — then work through water, power, and testing. If anything is unclear, a licensed electrician can confirm the hookup is safe, and I am glad to help you review the rest.

! Confirm an old hookup is safe

If you are ever unsure whether an existing generator hookup is a proper transfer switch or a dangerous backfeed arrangement, have a licensed electrician confirm it. Safety first, always.

The myths behind the mistakes

Most mistakes start as a myth. Here are the big ones, corrected in a single place.

The myth	The honest truth
Any generator can run a well pump.	Only one with 240 volts and enough surge — many cannot.
I can cord or backfeed power to the pump.	It is hardwired — use a transfer switch; never backfeed.
My pressure tank holds days of water.	Its usable reserve is minutes — keep stored water.
I'll sort it out when the power goes.	Plan and test on a calm day — an outage is no time to learn.

✓ **Correct the myth, avoid the mistake**

Each mistake in this guide starts as one of these myths. Replace the myth with the truth and the mistake simply does not happen.

What I can do — and what I bring in a pro for

Here is my honest role in helping you avoid these mistakes.

- **What I do:** review your plan against this list, help you get your pump's numbers, choose the right gear, and test the whole thing — at your pace.
- **A licensed electrician** confirms and installs the safe hookup and fixes any backfeed danger.
- **A well or pump professional** handles the pump, tank, and pump health — short-cycling, dry-run protection, and the like.

I am a patient tech helper with 30-plus years of experience, not a licensed electrician or well contractor — and I will always be clear about that line. What I bring is a friendly eye for these common mistakes and the calm to help you fix them one at a time.

★ A second pair of eyes on your plan

It is easy to miss a mistake in your own setup. A friendly review often catches one before it matters. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

Turning the mistakes into a good plan

Flip every mistake on its head and you have, in fact, a complete well-water backup plan.

That is the nice thing about a mistakes guide: each one points straight at what to do instead. Keep stored water. Know your pump. Buy the right generator. Use a safe hookup. Run it outdoors. Test it. Remember the septic pump, the animals, the heat, and the people. Write it down. That list is a good plan, plainly stated.

So do not read this guide as a list of ways to fail — read it as a checklist for getting it right. Every mistake avoided is a piece of a plan you can trust, built one sensible step at a time.

✓ Every mistake is a step in disguise

The fixes on this list add up to a complete plan. Work through them and you have not just avoided mistakes — you have built something solid.

Questions worth asking yourself

A few honest questions surface any mistake still lurking in your plan.

Q: What would happen if the power went out right now?

Walk it through in your mind. Wherever you get stuck or unsure is a mistake worth fixing before it is real.

Q: Am I relying on any single thing?

If one generator, one battery, or one anything is your whole plan, add a layer — stored water underneath, at least.

Q: Is anything on my setup untested or unclear?

Untested gear and unclear hookups are where surprises hide. Test and confirm on a calm day.

Q: Have I left anyone or anything off the plan?

The septic pump, animals, heat, and medical needs are the usual forgotten items. Check each one.

✓ Imagine the outage now

The best way to find a mistake is to picture a real outage and walk through it step by step. Every hesitation points at something to fix.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most about well-pump backup mistakes.

Q: What is the most common mistake?

Having no stored water — relying on a generator or battery alone. The fix is cheap and simple: keep a few days of water in place before any outage.

Q: What is the most dangerous mistake?

Backfeeding — running a cord into an outlet to power the home or pump. It can electrocute you or a lineman. Always use a transfer switch or interlock installed by a licensed electrician.

Q: Why won't my generator start my well pump?

Usually because it is 120-volt only or short on startup surge. Most well pumps need 240 volts and a big surge. Check both against your pump's numbers.

Q: How do I know if my plan has a mistake in it?

Run the self-check: stored water, pump numbers, 240-volt-capable backup, a safe hookup, a tested setup, and the forgotten loads covered. Any 'not sure' is worth a closer look.

★ Still have a question? That is what I am here for

There is no silly question. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and we will make sure your plan is free of these mistakes.

A gentle word about cost

Avoiding these mistakes is far cheaper than making them, which is the whole point of this guide.

Many of the fixes cost nothing but knowledge and a little time — keeping stored water, testing on a calm day, getting your pump's numbers, writing down a plan. The mistakes, by contrast, cost real money: the wrong generator bought twice, a pump worn out early, water damage from a frozen pipe, or worse. Prevention is the bargain here.

I do not sell generators, pumps, or batteries and earn nothing on your choices, so my advice is just honest advice about avoiding costly missteps. A little planning now saves a lot later — and keeps everyone safe, which is beyond price.

★ Prevention is the bargain

The cheapest money in this category is the money you do not waste on a mistake. My first visit is a flat \$99 with a 30-day come-back-free guarantee, and I can review your plan on your screen for \$49.

Bringing it all together

If this guide did its job, you can spot every common mistake before it costs you. Here it is in three lines.

- ❑ **Water and power:** keep stored water, know your pump, and buy backup that can truly start it.
- ❑ **Safety:** never backfeed, always run generators outdoors — the two rules that matter most.
- ❑ **Planning:** test it, write it down, and remember the forgotten loads.

Avoid these mistakes and what remains is a calm, complete, trustworthy plan. Every one you sidestep is money saved, danger avoided, and one less surprise on a hard day. That is a good trade.

★ And whenever you would like a hand

That is exactly what I do — come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made avoiding the common well-pump backup mistakes feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I don't do the licensed electrical or gas work myself — for that I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro.

★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

Four Kinds of Mistakes

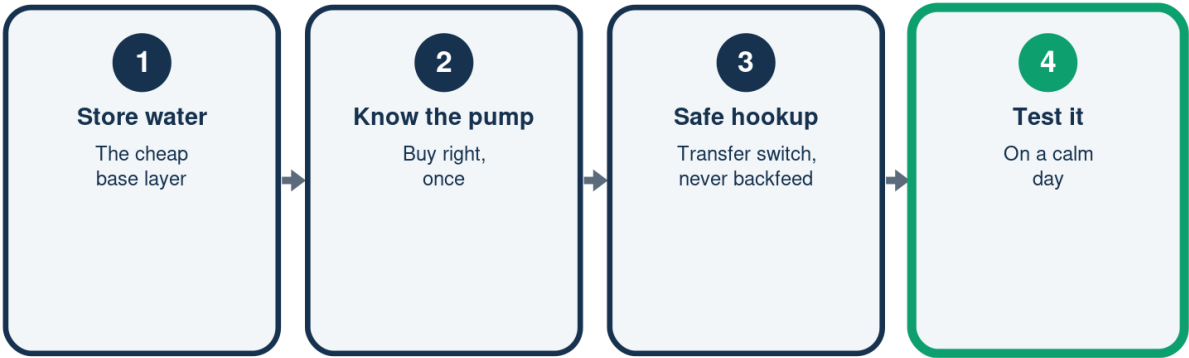
And the honest fix for each

	Kind	The fix
Water	No stored water	Keep a few days
Power	Wrong generator	Know your pump first
Safety	Backfeed / CO	Transfer switch; outdoors
Planning	Untested plan	Test on a calm day

Every mistake has a simple, known fix.

If You Fix Only Five Things

The high-value fixes



These prevent almost all the regret and danger.

The Two Deadly Mistakes

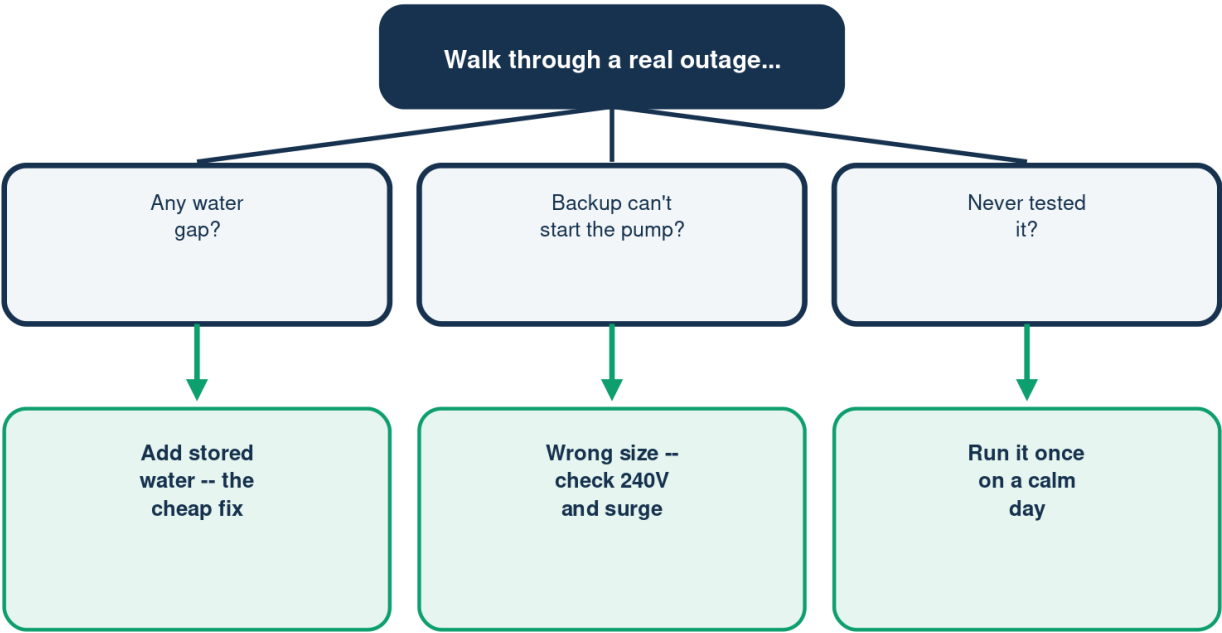
These are about life, not money

	Deadly mistake	The rule
Backfeeding	Never -- use a	transfer switch
Generator indoors	Never -- outdoors,	20+ feet away
Open door 'fix'	Not safe --	CO still kills
Who installs	Licensed	electrician

Get these two right above everything else.

Is There a Mistake in My Plan?

A quick self-check



Any 'not sure' is a mistake worth fixing before the next outage.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.



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A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

— *Bill*



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